

for a political analysis
→ review Brecht/Godard issues
→ political postmodernism

D20-2 lect notes 1

Godard and others--the impact of film practice on film theory
Godard as Brechtian; as postmodernist

Many use the model of scientific investigation
--that theory proceeds practice

medicine, engineering, etc.

(this of course is flattering to theorists)

However, in the human sciences it is different

practice, in this case the art of film as developed by filmmakers,
almost always precedes film theory

Film theory is a relentless attempt to catch up to film practice
exception--the extreme distortion produced in academic film studies
in the 70s-80s by a specific group who want to monopolize the discussion for
reasons of professional self promotion (example of CPAs and taxes) who
attempt to redefine film theory as a certain kind of discourse
[refer to institutional analysis in 1st quarter]

Just as Italian neo-realism was the "right" movement for Bazinian theory
[the current canon], the film movements of the 60s were the basis for the
film theories of the post 68 period.

although not uniformly--the changing fortunes of Bergman
the important examples of Antonioni, Rossellini

Godard becomes the most crystalized version of 60s concerns in film
his extreme self consciousness of film
of himself and his own ideas and personality (public persona as self
promo)

Godard as Swiss intellectual
the romanticism of Rousseau
the rationalism of Voltaire

The key films

Breathless

Vivre Sa Vie

Pierrot Le Fou

Alphaville

Masculin-Feminine (in our collection)

Weekend as Godard's critique of modern civilization
1966

the idea of mixing drastically different styles, forms
assaulting conventional expectations (esp. bourgeois good taste)
"absurdist"
political, in a certain way

moralistic (always in Godard)

The concept of classical Hollywood cinema

read Bordwell essay from this perspective

The idea of a Brechtian cinema, influence of BB

[see Wollen essay on Wind from the East as counter-cinema]

[NB. The JC definition of counter-cinema is much broader than the dominant notion in film theory]

The problem of a political reading of Brecht vs. a strictly formalist reading
example of Brian Henderson essay (in M&M 1, H's Critique)

"Toward a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style"

claims that the camera movements in themselves are ideological
(or in this case anti-bourgeois ideology)

Robin Wood's reply: but I end up enjoying it, appreciating it as
its own aesthetic choice/device

test this for yourself when we see the film

[note too, that this argument is essentially the same as (ie
working in the same set of presuppositions as) Bazin's argument
that style creates meaning, and Henderson's argument is not all
that much different than Bazin's in explicating the sequence
shot in Le crime de M. Lange.

An apparent puzzle. The resolution: The concept of "Brechtian" must be understood as fundamentally political, and not therefore reducible to form alone. The notion of a strictly formal attack on bourgeois ideology is the dream of petty bourgeois intellectuals who would like a painless revolution that only takes place in people's heads, that could be accomplished in form alone. In actual point of fact, Brechtian has to be understood with the following minimal concerns:

a. a radical content

b. an innovative form that resists "easy" or "comfortable" assimilation
[B's attack on "culinary" or "Aristotelean" theatre]

c. an historical moment, a political context

d. and an audience, ready, willing, and able to take action

BB--good theatre divides its audience

Godard as postmodernist

postmodernism

being after modernism

1. vs. eclecticism, for the clean, machine age, Bauhaus,
form follows function

2. novelty and originality, always avant garde
3. reject decoration, ornament; for geometric, clear
4. vs. national, regional, vernacular, for the international and cosmopolitan
5. art of the future--would affect society (but fundamentally elitist--intellectuals will decide)
example: Le Corbusier housing blocks

postmod

characteristics:

1. plurality of styles, hybrid, eclecticism
2. recycling of styles, "retro style"; quotations, collage, parody, pastiche
3. ornament and decoration
4. mix high and low culture, assumes various responses from general public and those "in the know" [a kind of irony] but makes work accessible to both
5. concern with meaning, statement (art can communicate, this should be a concern of the artist)
6. "intertextuality" constant reference to the world of art, of media itself, as an artificial but real part of existence. Art and discourse structure the way we understand the world of "the Real". Out there is in here.

reading: Wolff. read closely. for general argument.

aesthetics and lifestyle in late capitalism

Chuck Kleinhans, draft version October 1986

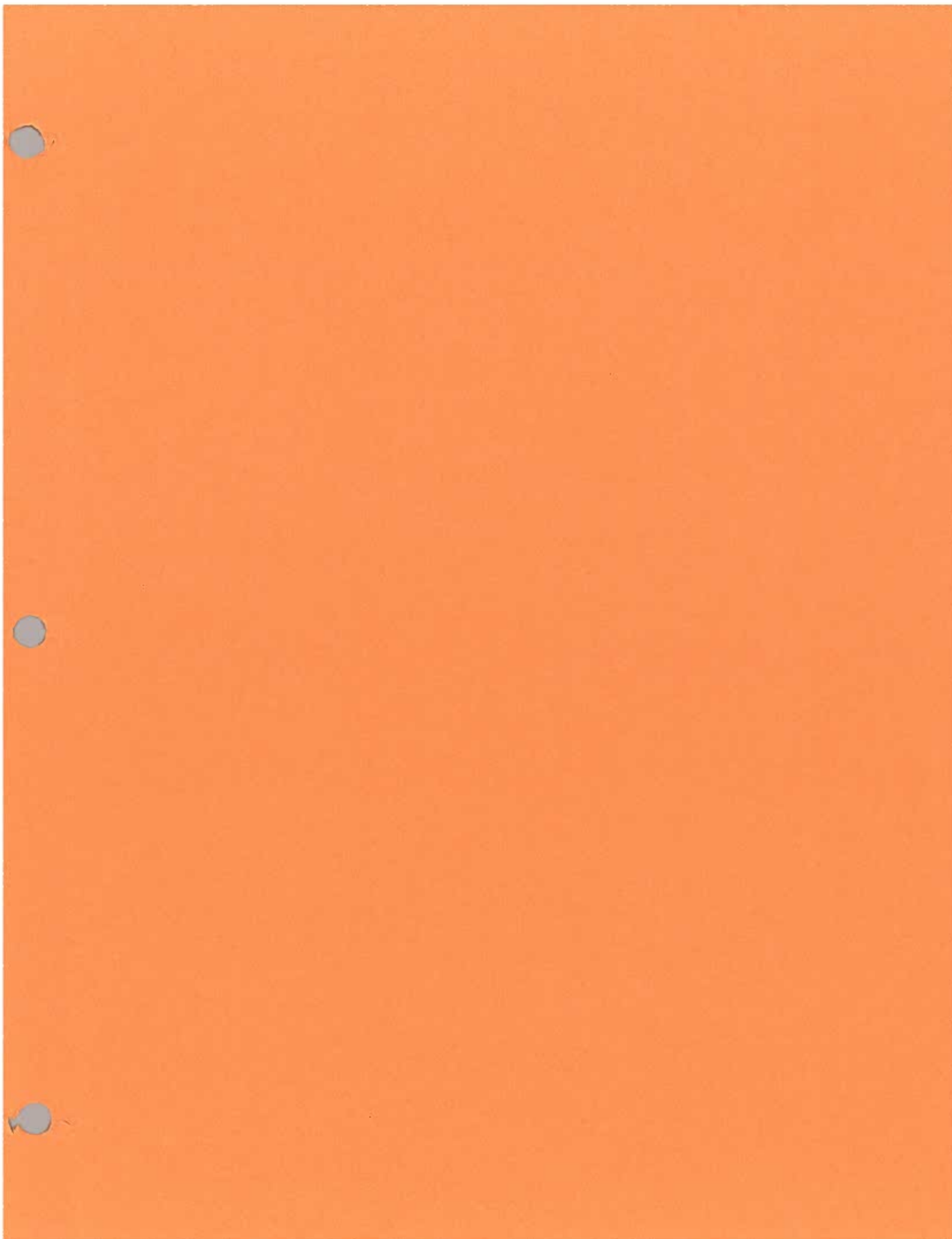
American Pop art was the first high culture gallery art to successfully negotiate the postmod situation. While assuming an amused irony, it appropriated the techniques of commercial illustration and gave them the aura of art, the original. Pop mixed the style of sign painting and the realism of the object displayed. In films such as Bruce Conner's **Report** and Kenneth Anger's **Scorpio Rising** it expanded the art of satiric montage. And it created the first space for the hybrid styles which mark the present era.

postmodern. 1. referring to the contemporary situation of art, assuming that we are somehow past a tradition or period of the modern in the various arts. Since the different arts and individuals define modernism and its period differently, understandings of postmodernism vary considerably (a movement? a structural situation? a set of style options? a gesture to the masses in working with mass culture? another critical fiction?)

postmodern, 2. the condition of being after modernism. This assumes that the term modernism is understood and agreed upon, and that we are now past it (because old modernists are dying off at a rapid pace? that there are only a few left: were you surprized when Henry Moore (or other recent artist death) died because you hadn't really thought he was still alive? he was part of an past5, art historical context, not a present art practice context.

Some general and non exclusive characteristics of postmodernism:

The acceptance of a variety of styles in the same spacio-temporal environment as well as within a particular work. Contrast this with modernist concern with uniformity and coordination of major and minor arts (and the very acceptance of the major/minor distinction). E.g., the Bauhaus mottoes and goals of less is more, form follows function, are concerned with understatement in contrast to a Victorian and Beidermeyer style of extreme ornamentation and decoration. The Bauhaus integrates architecture and interior design, pottery and ceramics, table settings and designer fashions. In this it is a 20th century elaboration of some of the goals of William Morris in validating craft, elevating it with respect to the high arts. Morris is a challenge to the Kantian distinction of art and craft and to the Kantian hypothesis of the aesthetic experience.



D20-2 exam

Identify author, article/book/chapter, explain underlined terms, briefly indicate importance of the quote/concept to the course.

1. The lyrics enhance the provocation, opening a paradigm which informs the structure of the narrative--an opposition between the sexual display made of these women (their exploitation as objects within the film's narrative and for the film's appeal) and the women's expressed cynicism and cleverness (the satire in which the objects take on the role of critical subjects). This opposition between "come on" and "put down" provides the ambiguity which is essential to the ambiance of the sophisticated tease.
2. ...some credit is due the woman who came to Hollywood in the mid-1950s when actresses were considered properties and who refused to mold herself into the ready-made star image with cheesecake photos, expensive wardrobe, and a glamorous social life.
3. In fact, the meaning which audiences "read" in texts and other cultural products is partly constructed by those audiences.

Short definition

Hermeneutics

Newsreel

Success myth

Scopophilia

Briefly discuss in the context of this course:

"Madonna is nobody's victim." Gloria Steinem, on National Public Radio, "All Things Considered," Dec. 4, 1986.

D20-1

Name	Size	Kind	Last Modified
D20-1 course eval.	2K	document	Wed, Dec 3, 1986 1:19 AM
D20-1 exam 1.1	3K	Microsoft Word d...	Sat, Oct 31, 1987 2:33 PM
D20-1 final exam, pt. 2	3K	document	Tue, Dec 2, 1986 11:59 PM
D20-1 final, pt. 2	3K	Microsoft Word d...	Sat, Oct 31, 1987 1:30 PM
D20-1 makeup exam	4K	document	Thu, Jan 15, 1987 7:49 AM
D20-1 makeup exam 1.1	4K	Microsoft Word d...	Sat, Oct 31, 1987 2:01 PM

D20-1 Makeup exam
part one: 50 min.

1. Aesthetic value enters into a close relationship with the extra-aesthetic values which a work contains, and, through their agency, with the system of values which determine the life practice of that collective which perceives the work. The relationship of aesthetic value to extra-aesthetic value is such that it dominates over the others, but it does not disturb them, only joining them into a whole
2. To produce the truth, to show the reality, all the reality, nothing but the reality, is perhaps an honourable intention, but stated in that way it is no more than a moral precept. In the cinema there can be only a representation of reality. The aesthetic problem begins with the means of this representation. A dead child in close-up is not a dead child in long-shot any more than a dead child in color.
3. The hunting ground of the motion picture camera is in principle unlimited; it is the external world expanding in all directions. Yet there are certain subjects within that world which may be termed "cinematic" because they seem to exert a peculiar attraction on the medium. It is as if the medium were predestined (and eager) to exhibit them.
4. In the realm of the cinema, all nonnarrative genres--the documentary, the technical film, etc.--have become marginal provinces, border regions so to speak, while the feature length film of novelistic fiction, which is simply called "a film"--the usage is significant--has traced more and more clearly the king's highway of filmic expression.

5. To determine the nature of montage is to solve the specific nature of the cinema.

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6. Define diegesis.

7. Discuss two objections to and/or corrections of the **Young Mr. Lincoln** piece by subsequent commentators.

8. Present a short inventory of the most important, or main ideas of the Russian Formalists.

9. What is the significance of Goffman's general idea for this course? Relate it to a later concern in the course, a different theorist or set of theorists.

Exam, part two. Do the music video question or the following essay.

Write an essay comparing and contrasting the general position of Bazin/Kracauer and other realist theories with the general position of Eisenstein and the Formalists. Then discuss how their particular perceptions and values colors which films they validate. Then discuss the **Young Mr. Lincoln** article and subsequent discussion of it in terms of your previous points. Does *Cahiers du cinema* favor one side or the other? does *Cahiers* synthesize from both? or something else?

D20-2 final exam

Write for 15 minutes each on three of the following:

1. What are the major reasons Augst gives for the "lure of psychoanalysis" in recent film theory?
2. Discuss the concept of "counter-cinema" as developed by Wollen and one film or tape seen in this course (first or second half) that confirms or contradicts Wollen's analysis.
3. According to Desnoes, what is the photographic image of underdevelopment? Can you find an example of the same type of analysis in **Memories of Underdevelopment** ?
4. How does the position put forward in "Lesbians and Film" modify the feminist analysis of film?
5. What ideas are put forward in Enzensberger's "Constituents of a Theory of the Media" which add a new dimension to the recent discussion of film theory?

D20-1

Kleinhans, Fall 86-87

Course evaluation

How well did the course meet its primary goal of providing an introduction to and overview of the major issues and ideas in classical film theory?

How difficult was the course?

Evaluate the course

Evaluate the instructor

Cold War Liberals and the Mass Culture Debate

Basic elements of liberal ideology



Lectures

Readings



Screenings



Papers and exams



Other comments

D20-2 exam

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D20-1
Final Exam

The first part of the exam will take 50 min. and will involve short answers, identification of quotes, explication of terms and concepts covering all the readings for the course. You should expect to review all the readings and have a ready knowledge of the major ideas in each theorist and/or selection. You should also review your notes from lectures and screenings.

The second part of the exam is a written essay in response to one of the following questions, using one or more music videos as your example(s). In other words, you can assume that I know the video you are talking about and you can thus refer to it to make points without detailing the text itself. [Example: you could refer to Madonna's parody of Marilyn Monroe in **Material Girl** to talk about recycling images or to talk about gender and nonverbal communication. You would not have to then explain in detail *how* she parodies or *all* the ways in which gender is distinguished.] You can draw examples from the tape I supply which can be checked out for use in the building during office hours. Overnight use must accomodate sharing with others in the class and the tape must be back by 9 am no exceptions and I will deduct at least one half of a letter grade if you screw up. You may use your own examples, but then must turn in a demo tape for me with your exam. Use the tape counter to let me know where the video is located.

Choose one. You may bring one page of notes or drawings.

1. Discuss the realist objections to formalism using at least two theorists from each group.
2. Most music videos strongly concentrate on the performer and spectacle rather than character and plot which have been the traditional concerns of film theory in approaching audio/visual presentation. Discuss this with reference to four major thinkers in film theory.
3. Apply some of the same concerns and types of analysis found in the **Young Mr. Lincoln** discussion to a music video.
4. Discuss the ideas of the Russian Formalists and Eisenstein on editing and then show how that can be applied to understanding music video.
5. Present your own position on the question of evaluation; that is, how do you understand aesthetic value, and how do you discriminate among

different works? Use several music videos to explain your ideas.